2; Skrefarud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

II. CHAṬIAR, CEREMONIAL CLEANSING

a. Janam chaṭiar, ceremonial cleansing after birth[1].

611 844 783

Children are named after (i. e. born into) the sept of their father, not after that of their mother. When a child is born in a village, this village becomes ceremonially unclean; therefore they do not perform any bonga-worship until the uncleanness has been blotted out. And where a child is born, this house becomes unclean; therefore until the uncleanness is wiped out, no inhabitant of the village will eat or drink in this house.

When a boy is born, they shave on the fifth day, and if it is a girl on the third day. On the day of shaving the father of the child calls on all, (also) poor people, to be shaved. They come together at his house; when all are come they set a barber to do the shaving. First of all he shaves the village priest, thereupon the field priest, thereupon the village headman, the deputy headman, the headman of morals and his deputy and the messenger of the village headman, and thereupon all the men of the village and last of all the father of the child.

852

Now the barber calls for the new-born child. The woman who has worked as midwife carries the child in her arms out to the door, bringing along two leaf-cups, one leaf-cup with water and one to put the hair in. The barber shaves the child[2]; when this is done, the midwife puts this hair in the leaf-cup; thereupon she binds two threads on the arrow with which she cut the umbilical cord when the child was born. Now the child's father fills oil in the leaf-cup and calls on the men of the village to come along with him to a place where they can go down to the water. They go along. When they come back after having bathed, the midwife takes along with her oil and turmeric and the arrow on which the two threads are bound, and calling on the women of the village to come along she takes them to the watering-place to bathe. They go there. At the place of bathing the midwife throws one thread together with the child's hair into the water and lets it float away, after she has made five marks of sindur at the descent to the water. This they call to buy way down to water. The other thread and the arrow she washes and brings with her back to the house, when all of them have bathed. Arrived to the house the midwife immerses the remaining thread in turmeric(water), and this she makes into

[1] The word is possibly to be connected with S. *chaṭi*, the sixth (day after birth, when the house is cleaned, the child named, and so on). [2] The whole head.

[192]

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42

[P.186]

CHAPTER VII

FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

121 If at any moment mankind has thought and felt that there must be "more things in heaven and earth" than dreamt of by one's philosophy, it is at the cross roads of life, such as births, marriages and deaths. Whence comes this life, by what ceremonials will the married couple's life progress to their mutual well-being and, as members of the big human society, by what processes can we on earth ensure the peace, if not the happiness, of the departed spirit? These are questions that have deeply affected human thought, civilized or uncivilized. It is to tackle these problems that the Santals have recourse to elaborate ceremonials, to bring luck to them, and to propitiate their gods and goddesses, so that the malevolent powers may be shorn of their malign influence and the benevolent may protect them.

121 771 782 796

In the next few pages, we propose to deal with the ceremonies as observed by the Santals to ward off unknown dangers, and to feel at ease that something has been done to propitiate the deities.

844

Birth

When a baby is coming to a Santal family, no new shed is erected as a lying-in room, but any

Bi Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

wing of the house serves the purpose. A midwife, a Santal woman of the profession, attends on the parturient woman with her elderly women-relatives. In cases of difficult delivery, *Ojha*s (exorcists) are summoned to perform rites so as to expel the ghosts, supposed to be creating difficulties.

When the child is born, the umbilical cord is severed by the midwife with a sharp iron weapon such as an arrow-blade. The baby is now bathed in tepid water and the navel-string buried near the main door of the room of its birth.

As regards ceremonial uncleanliness for the baby and its mother, the practice differs in different areas of Mayurbhanj. Some do not observe any segregation whatsoever; while others observe it for varying periods[1] from one to twenty-one days, during which they may not visit the room, touch the baby or its mother. The observance of this birth-pollution in some areas and its negation in others, throws a flood of light on the influence of others on their customs and manners. During her confinement, the mother is allowed to eat warm rice with salt, leaves of

1. On this point, Nabin Mañjhi, an old Santal said that custom requires that twelve days should be observed. But it has slackened and men now sometimes consider themselves ceremonially clean, immediately after a child-birth in the house.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42

843 *Murài arak'* (an edible leaf, the radish, *Raphanus sativus*, Linn.), and garlic. The members of the family have no particular food-prohibition during this period.

844 783 184 In the Santal Parganas, the house and village become religiously unclean. No festivals or sacrifices are held in the village nor anybody dines in the house of child-birth till after purification, three or five days after, by the *chàṭiar* ceremony.

Narta (*Name-giving Ceremony*)

553 184 The usual Santal custom is to observe the name-giving ceremony between the third and fifth day after birth. But in Mayurbhanj, some observe it within one year, the date being fixed by the head of the family; while there are others, who may delay it up to the tenth year.

553 574 431 On the date of the ceremony being announced, friends and relatives of the family are invited. They arrive on the day fixed, with presents of rice, cloth, *hàndia* (rice-beer), necklaces of beads (*mala*) and *dora* (string worn round the waist, pronounced *dara* by Mayurbhanj Santals) for the new-born child. Now the midwife, who delivered the child, sits with the baby facing east, and with a leaf-cup in front, containing turmeric paste, *mohua* oil and water.

553 782 887 An old man of the village offers the rice-beer presented by others and mixed with the family

42 Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

way : the husband is made to stand facing the sun on one leg (generally the left). He has a cloth round his neck each end of which is held in the hand along with three sal leaves. Then taking the name of Sin-Bonga he tears the sal leaves in token of separation and upsets a brass pot full of water. This is repeated by the wife also.[1]

586 [510] [824]

Birth and Naming Ceremony : When the Santal woman becomes pregnant, she and her husband observe certain taboos. The husband during his wife's pregnancy never kills any animal, nor participates in any funeral ceremony and does not come in contact with any dead body. The pregnant woman during the evening very rarely comes out of the house, she never crosses any streamlet, she does not weep when any death occurs of her relations. On the day of the moon-eclipse she does not come out of the room. She should not sit on the verandah with her hair or her cloth hanging down on the courtyard side. All these taboos signify that the Santals have a strong belief that malevolent spirits or witches do mischief to the pregnant women.

843 784 [821]

The Santals believe that after ten months the women give birth. When the labour pain starts the pregnant woman is confined in a room, which is generally a corner of the house or a portion of the verandah partitioned with bamboo and leaves. At birth, an experienced elderly woman of the village or of the adjoining village officiates as midwife. No one is allowed to remain there except one or two female relatives of the pregnant woman. After birth, the umbilical cord is

844 [842]

[1]There is a belief that if the sal leaves are not fully torn or the lota not wholly emptied then the couple must again come together.

4: Biswas D, E-3,4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

844 cut by the midwife with an arrow by placing a coin beneath it, which is afterwards taken by the midwife. The placenta is then buried in a pit in one corner of the courtyard of the house. Immediately a birth is announced there is a gathering of friends and relations for congratulating the parents. After the birth of a child, the house and the village is considered polluted. So the Santals perform the *Janam Chatiar* ceremony, until this is done it is considered unpropituous to engage in any shikar or hunting expedition or religious ceremonies. The usual day for this ceremony is on the fifth day in the case of a male child and on the third day in the case of a female child. All the male members of the village come to the house of birth, first the village officials are shaved then all the other men present and then the father of the child. Then the midwife brings the child near the barber to cut a few locks of hair from the different parts of the head of the child, which are put in a leaf cup. The midwife then ties two threads to the arrow with which the umbilical cord was cut. All the village officials and other male members go to have their bath in a nearby streamlet. Then the midwife carries the child and together with the mother and the women of the village goes to the bathing place. There, the midwife throws the locks of hair and one of the threads in the water. After bathing they come back to the house. The midwife brings with her the second thread and the arrow, this thread is then smeared with turmeric and tied round the waist of the child.

When the purification has been completed, the men women and children of the village who have assembled at the house receive each a leaf cup full of rice water

4; Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

624 and scold him and fine him. At the time of *Sohrae* [796] *parab* all the villagers, young and old, male and female, drink handi (rice beer). Singing, dancing and other entertainments go on without restriction for five days and nights and at these times the boys and girls remain in charge of the Jogmanjhi. At the birth of a [844] child and at marriages he is in charge of those cere- [585] monies, and when the village youths attend a night festival he is in charge of them. Formerly he had a [178] very important position though now gradually he is losing all authority; but the young people still use him as a safe repository of their secrets. The *Jogmanjhi* has an assistant called *Jog-Paramanik* who officiates when he is absent.

Village Beadle—Goddet (Gorait-Risley): Next in rank is the *Goddet*, an orderly or peon of the headman of the village, who calls the villagers together at his command and also collects sacrificial fowl for the village sacrifices. Whenever any foreigner comes in the village and enquires about the headman, the *Goddet* at once [114] runs and informs him. (One morning I went to a village at Katikund within Dumka Sub-division. I asked the villager where the headman of the village was. The *Goddet* said he was in the agricultural field and at once ran to call him. He then came back with the headman to me). The Santals call the *Goddet Marang, Manjhi* i.e., great chief, and there are many instances of *Goddets* having ousted a *Manjhi* or even a *Parganait*. If a *Paramanik* gets the office of *Manjhi* it is considered proper that the *Goddet* should become *Paramanik*.

At Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

759 [602] not belong to the same generation as the parents of the mother. It is better for her to belong to the generation of the grandparents, because it is not fitting for the woman in childbirth to expose her nakedness before anyone who belongs to the generation of her own parents. Midwives are held in respect, and their work puts them in a relation of intimacy with large numbers of their fellow villagers. They are known as *dhai*, the common word in most parts of North India, but they are also referred to as *ojha budhi* and sometimes as *dak' dul budhi*, "water-pouring old women". The midwife is always a Santal, and being an inhabitant of the same or of a neighbouring village, she is not sent for until the pains begin. At the same time all the married women of the village are informed, and they gather at the house in order, as they say, to give courage to the mother now that her time has arrived. On one occasion I was called in to help in the settlement [123] [578] of a dispute in which a woman had been accused of infidelity by her husband. She had gone to her mother's home before the birth of her child—this being an action which is not in accord with Santal ideas—and the strongest evidence of infidelity offered by the husband was the fact that when the baby was born his wife's mother did not inform any of her fellow villagers.

• 644 The day of delivery is the mother's "sitting day", and the name describes the position of the mother at the time of birth. The mother may sit either on a mat which has been placed on the floor or on a string bed. There seems to be no rule as to which of these two places must be adopted, except that when a woman has been on the floor for the birth of her first child she will continue to sit there for the birth of later children. In either case she remains in the ordinary dwelling house. She is supported at her back by one of the women, who again must be either two generations removed from her or else be of her own generation. It is the duty of the midwife to cut the umbilical cord, and this is not done until after the placenta has fallen. The child is not put to the mother's breast until after the cord has been cut. This is cut with an arrow, having a coin placed beneath it. This is most usually a copper pice, but it may be a coin of higher value when the financial position of the family warrants it, and the coin is given to the midwife. They say that midwives are able to foretell the sex of children still to be born according to the position of certain irregularities on the surface of the umbilical cord which are caused, I am told, by the twisting or congestion of blood vessels. In addition, if they are desired to do

54 Culshaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

so, they are able to determine the sex of subsequent children according to the place at which the cord is cut. 844

Special measures have to be taken when delivery proves to be difficult. An *ojha* is called in if he lives at hand. He may resort to consulting the omens with leaf and oil, but if matters do not appear to be so serious he proceeds at once to prescribe treatment. One of his methods is to take a square of bark from a plantain tree in his right hand and to prick it repeatedly with a needle held in his left hand. Or a dagger is held upright over a brass drinking vessel and water is poured down the blade of the dagger, this water afterwards being given to the mother to drink. Another method is to tie a root to the mother's hair. It is important that the strand of hair to which the root is tied should be cut off as soon as the birth has taken place, lest she should lose her entrails as well. No men are admitted to the room where the birth is taking place, and the husband has to remain at hand in the courtyard. When the delivery is difficult he comes in for some chaffing or abuse according to the degree of difficulty. Some action of his at the time when conception occurred is held to be responsible. One of his duties is to keep by him the materials for lighting a fire in the room after the child is born. No fire is kept lit during the process of birth, but the fire lit immediately afterwards is used for providing a dry-heat massage for his wife's abdomen and for massage of the infant. As soon as the child is born, the women cry out the news to the husband and any others in the courtyard, and the former takes a large stick with which he repeatedly beats the roof, crying out loudly at the same time to drive away any lurking ghosts. As soon as the floor has been cleaned and the mother is resting, the husband is admitted into the room. He then digs a hole in the floor with a ploughshare and in it he buries the afterbirth. It must not be buried directly beneath a rafter. The Santal does not talk of his "birthplace"; he refers to it as "the village where my afterbirth was buried". 845 [593] [372] 844

One of the ceremonies that take place on the day that the child is born appears to relate chiefly to the wellbeing of the mother. She and the midwife sit facing each other on the floor of the house. The mother fills a leaf cup with distilled liquor and passes the cup to the midwife, who throws away its contents on her left side; this is repeated three times. The ceremony is known as *met' halan*, or "lifting the eye", and no Santal has been able to offer me an explanation of the custom. It may be ascribed to the necessity for taking precautions against the evil eye. 844 788

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

844 783 192 783 846 [789]

evil eye. Most of the subsequent proceedings centre round the child.

The word *chatiar* is used both in connection with birth ceremonial and the later initiation. It is connected with the Hindi *chut*, which means "pollution", but the ceremonial stands not only for the removal of uncleanness but also for the reception, of the new member into society. The ceremonial uncleanness resulting from birth is shared by the whole village, and no religious festival may be held until it has been removed. The house in which the birth has occurred is the centre of the pollution, and none of the other villagers will eat or drink there while it is in operation. If anyone is wearing a charm against illness he removes it before entering the courtyard of the house, lest the charm lose its power. Although all the ceremonies must be completed within a month after the birth of the child, the actual dates may be modified by a variety of considerations. If a festival is due the ceremonies will be advanced rather than delay or abandon the festival. During the cultivation season they may be either advanced or delayed in order to suit the convenience of work in the fields. The normal day for the *chatiar* is on the fifth day after the birth of a boy and on the third day after the birth of a girl. The essential elements in the removal of pollution are shaving and bathing. The villagers all gather together in the courtyard, and first of all the barber—one of the villagers, a Santal—shaves the village officials, then all the men present and lastly the father of the child. The newborn child is then carried by the midwife to the barber, who cuts five locks from the child's head: two from the front, one from each side and one from the middle of the back of the head. These locks are placed in a leaf cup pending their disposal. When the shaving has been completed the men go to the nearest bathing place and bathe themselves. On their return to the house the midwife takes all the women down to bathe, and she carries the arrow that was used for cutting the umbilical cord. Two pieces of string are attached to the arrow; one of these is used to tie up in a bundle the child's hair, and at the bathing place the hairs are detached and floated away on the water. The second string is soaked in oil and turmeric and tied round the child's waist; there it remains until it is worn out, when it is always replaced by another. When the women return from the bathing place the mother sips some cowdung and water that has been prepared by the midwife and rubs some of the mixture on her head. Then three leaf cups are filled with a paste made from sun-dried rice and water. The con-

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42
[The Santal Christian Community]

this occasion they make use of *sarpa*, and the Christmas songs that they sing are set to *Sohrae* tunes, as Christmas falls into the harvest season. During the afternoon of Christmas Day sports are held. These attract large numbers of spectators, and the final item in the sports, an archery contest, has become established as one of the events of the countryside. The interest and enthusiasm of spectators and competitors, who gather year after year to display their skill, is out of all proportion to the value of the prize that is offered. When the sports end the people disperse, the Christians to feast in their own homes.

Good Friday is observed with great solemnity, and the majority of the adults fast until after they have attended church. The services are very well attended, and on the initiative of the people themselves new forms of celebration are frequently being introduced. In most of the local churches the three-hour service has established itself in the customs of the people. On Good Friday in 1946 at the village of Barikul the people decided to follow the service by a silent procession through the village street. They filed behind a "standard bearer" who carried a rude cross fashioned from two *sarjom* saplings. At Easter it is customary for the dawn to be greeted by bands of young men singing in the village and also at the local Christian burial ground. The day is also characterized by large and enthusiastic gatherings of worshippers. Little has been done in this area to "baptize" the magico-religious practices connected with agriculture, and although Harvest Festivals are celebrated by the bringing of thank-offerings to church and the decoration of the church buildings, they have not become times of community rejoicing and remembrance as have the historic occasions associated with the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Saviour.

In the customs that surround life's crises one sees the blending of old and new concepts and symbols. Pregnancy taboos are widely observed, and steps have to be taken by Christians to remove the uncleanness resulting from birth. The practice of "churching" women was not introduced to the people at the beginning and it has never been put in the forefront, but the Christians carry out the bathing and naming and the feasting of neighbours. In this they are joined in many cases by non-Christian villagers, though no two Christian occasions are alike in this respect. In some places most of the villagers gather, in other places all the women come, while at other villages only Christians collect. Something depends on the strength and persistence